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A CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL OWNED BY LAY PEOPLE
Jim Bowman

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BILINGUALGATE
Lost for words, lost for life
Jack Freiberger

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CORRESPONDENCE

Canadians 'A' not us

Fort Dodge, Iowa

To the Editors: Those who cite the Canadian medical system as a model [Correspondence, February 25] overlook many key issues:

The American and Canadian populations are not comparable. Canadians are a relatively homogeneous group. Their society contains no large population groups disproportionately afflicted with drug abuse, AIDS, illiteracy, or chronic dependency.

Canada's population is smaller than California's. In citing the small number of employees administering the Canadian medical system, some commentators naively assume that our federal government would be comparably efficient running a complex plan for 250 million patients.

Letter writers do not discuss how our system will fare when a single agency, the federal government, sets the standards for care and unilaterally determines the fees that can be charged. When there is only one payer, that payer controls the system....

The initial impact of nationalizing medicine will be cushioned by the fact that the present ranks of our medical profession are filled by individuals who rank high in academic ability and dedication. They will remain for a time. Yet many individuals of this type will choose less restrictive fields when our honored profession becomes an overregulated monopoly of government. (In the former Soviet system, basically a single-payer plan, doctors' salaries deteriorated to a level well below that of factory workers.)

The Veterans Administration hospitals and the Indian Service are existing examples of federally controlled medicine in the U.S. It is not these agencies that attract the seriously ill patients who come to American medical centers from all over the world. Note also that the patients waiting for admission to Canadian hospitals are almost all Canadians.

HERBERT H. KERSTEN, M.D

COMMONWEAL

RELIGION & THE MEDIA

THREE **COMMONWEAL** FORUMS

WAR OF THE WORLDVIEWS?

Religion and the media, one of America's most neuralgic issues, gets close scrutiny in Chicago, Thursday, June 9, Loyola University; Washington, Tuesday, September 13, Georgetown University; New York, Tuesday, October 15, Fordham Universtiy

The Chicago Forum: Loyola University (Downtown) 1 to 4:30 P.M. (reception to follow). **Keynote speaker**: Peter Steinfels, *New York Times*. **Panel**: Don Wycliff, *Chicago Tribune*; Carol Marin, NBC News; David Neff, *Christianity Today*; Martin Marty, *Christian Century*. Plus invited respondents and audience discussion.

The Forum is open to the public. Registration fee: $20. Loyola University is cosponsor of the Chicago gathering. The project is partially supported through a grant from the Catholic Communication Campaign.

For further information, please phone 212-732-0800, or write:

COMMONWEAL 15 DUTCH ST., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10038

Help is at hand

Kent, Wash.

To the Editors: After reading the Madelein Gray abortion chronicle ["Giving up the Gift," February 25], I want her to know that she is not alone in her painful search for healing following her abortion decision. The anguish she felt, and may still feel at times, is so prevalent it is recognized as Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS). And, yes, there are many priests who will listen compassionately to the woman who has aborted her child and who will not send her away from God or the church. The number to call is 1 (800) 5WE CARE. There was help for Madelein when she needed it. I'm sorry we didn't get to tell her about it.

PAT KING

The writer is author of Catholic Women and Abortion: Stories of Healing, *to be published in September by Sheed & Ward.*

A unisex message

Matawan, N.J.

To the Editors: The eighth paragraph of your editorial "The State of Disunion" [February 11] begins: "Encourage ado-

(Continued on page 26)

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COMMONWEAL

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Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome but must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Perspective on Whitewater

The business of government is governing. That in a few words was the subtext of President Bill Clinton's March 24 news conference; he defended what his administration has so far accomplished and laid out the major legislative efforts that await, especially health-care and welfare reform. In the executive branch a firmer grip on foreign policy; a surer sense of military strategy, and with it budgeting; and a sustained balancing of a jobs policy and a trade policy—all of these matters require serious presidential leadership. But if that was the subtext, inevitably Mr. Clinton's text was Whitewater. Here he tried to fill in some blanks, offer some perspective, and, once again, assert that he and Mrs. Clinton are innocent of the allegations that swirl around them. In the succinct phrase of Mark Shields ("MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour"), Clinton defended himself without being defensive. Mr. Clinton wants to govern. Will Congress and the media let him? Their institutional responsibilities for oversight and public information also entail responsibilities to act fairly and to maintain perspective.

It is now a given of the Whitewater affair that Mr. and Mrs. Clinton have brought this mess upon themselves. Trying to avoid answering questions about their financial and political affairs in Arkansas, they first claimed innocence and pleaded privacy; when that failed to persuade, they tried candor while seeming to practice damage control. Files related to the Clintons' Whitewater investments were removed from Vincent Foster's office after his suicide. White House aides had conversations with officials from the Treasury and Justice Departments about the investigations of Whitewater and the collapse of Madison Guaranty. New allegations about Arkansas loans as well as Justice Department stonewalling have emerged from the investigations of special counsel Robert Fiske and Congressman James Leach (R-Iowa). As a result, accusations of a cover-up have been added to the Whitewater dispute. New questions, their merit unevaluated, emerge every day. None of this is going away soon.

Until the report of the special counsel is completed and the promised congressional hearings are held, Whitewater will stay on the front pages and absorb a good deal of attention, at least in Washington. If indeed the Clintons brought this mess upon themselves, they have been ably assisted by a media free-for-all and the hyperbolic insinuations of some Republicans. Whatever the substance of the charges—and to date innuendo far exceeds reliable testimony and solid evidence—the prospect of protracted and inconclusive congressional hearings à la Iran-*contra* and Hill-Thomas is dispiriting indeed.

Of course, to clear the air, if it is to be cleared, the investigations and the hearings must proceed. But the real work of Washington cannot be put on hold while these continue. If the legitimacy of this presidency and its agenda is not to be completely eroded, Mr. Clinton should proceed, as promised, with the business of governing. And Congress and the media should strive to practice the same level of responsibility and accountability they have demanded of the first family.

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BANNED IN TRENTON

The temptation to respond to new situations with old habits is alive in the Catholic church. To wit:

Old habit—barring a Catholic speaker from a Catholic parish to protect the faithful from his or her views. New situation—at the end of the twentieth century not only are the media ready to step in, so is the Presbyterian or Unitarian or Methodist church down the street. Bottom line: Catholic church looks foolish, speaker is heard, episcopal authority is squandered, and at least a good number of Catholics feel belittled, angry, or unwelcome.

Bishop John Reiss of Trenton, New Jersey, forbade the pastor of Saint Anselm's in Wayside to allow the Reverend Richard McBrien to address the 1994 annual meeting of New Jersey Pax Christi in the parish center. The bishop's unexpected order came three days before the March 5 event, and in apparent response to anonymous phone calls that, like a subsequent flier, denounced McBrien as a "dissenter." Pax Christi decamped to the nearby Presbyterian Church on the Hill.

Could a bishop ever wisely declare Catholic premises off-bounds for certain speakers? Sure. Louis Farrakhan. Jack Kevorkian. Howard Stern. Mother Angelica (just kidding). Bar them and plainly say why.

But the Catholic conversation in this country is broad, albeit chaotic. Richard McBrien is very much part of it. Was the bishop's action an implicit endorsement of the notion that McBrien is a heretic? If so, that's simply wrong, and flagrantly un-Christian to boot. Was the bishop acting because McBrien can be blunt and abrasive? So can James Hitchcock, William Bennett, and, for that matter, a lot of pastors and a few bishops.

If banning Richard McBrien's voice from Catholic parishes becomes emblematic of what can and cannot be discussed within the Catholic community, we are in serious trouble.

ET CETERA

BRAVO Sydney Callahan, *Commonweal* columnist, longtime contributor, professor of psychology at Mercy College, and much much more, has been named the 1994 Laetare Medal winner by the University of Notre Dame, which in awarding the medal "celebrates an intellectual career characterized as much by compassion as by clarity."

Meanwhile, Michael Novak, once a *Commonweal* associate editor-at-large (1967-1971), now resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and editor-in-chief of *Crisis* magazine has been awarded the Templeton Prize for Progess in Religion, especially for his pioneering work in the theology of economics. Our hearty congratulations to both. Ms. Callahan will receive her prize at the Notre Dame commencement. Mr. Novak will have to leave these shores to receive his award at (gasp) Buckingham Palace.

REPORT FROM LOS ANGELES

BILINGUALGATE

LOST FOR WORDS, LOST FOR LIFE

I began my association with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in January 1990, as an elementary substitute school teacher. I continue in that position today.

One of the advantages a substitute teacher has over regular teachers, theorists, administrators, members of the school board, or ethnic activists is that every day he or she experiences how the system works (or doesn't) in a variety of classrooms and schools. Substitute teachers such as myself find themselves involved at all levels, K-6, including Learning Handicapped and Special Education. They have a distinct perspective on teachers, principals, and the system at large.

LAUSD teaches English as a second language. When I first started teaching, my excitement for the bilingual program was great. That all changed, however, when I began to experience its effects.

I teach in schools that are 85-90 percent Hispanic. I have taught on hundreds of different levels in hundreds of different classrooms. My conclusion: the bilingual system doesn't work and, in fact, deters Hispanic students from advancement and from integration into American society. In many cases, LAUSD's "transitional" bilingual program acts as a pink-slip, minimum-wage, welfare straitjacket for the child living in the *barrio*. If he or she can't read English, there will be no leaving the *barrio*.

South Los Angeles's poverty rate is higher now than at the time of the 1965 Watts riots. It is nearly three times higher than the national average. Hispanic families are the poorest ethnic group in the United States. With 28 percent below the poverty line, they more than double the national poverty rate of 13.5 percent. According to the National Council of La Raza, a Washington-based public-policy group, Hispanics "are the least educated major population in the United States." Even after twenty years of bilingual programs, as a group they have the highest school dropout rate (one in five).

Unfortunately, I see these statistics substantiated every day in the LAUSD. Each week I have a new fifth- or sixth-grade class somewhere in the Los Angeles area. A frighteningly large number of my students, including those born in the United States and those who have lived here for many years, lack all sense of sentence structure. They cannot identify a verb or spell such words as "his," "would," and "tree," and they are unable to recognize these words on a written page. They are light years away from having fifth- or sixth-grade composition skills in either Spanish or English. Simply put, even though these children were

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born here or have lived here many years, they are not being taught English.

The bilingual program is a form of permanent cultural impairment for Hispanics and a waste of millions of dollars for taxpayers. But it is a big moneymaker for the school system, and an incentive for bilingual teachers (they receive cash bonuses). One principal showed me the school budget. The schools can get up to $500 for each child they sign up for the bilingual program. Consequently, children are pushed to enroll. Most will remain in the program throughout their elementary school years, as there are only two ways to transfer to an English-only class: (1) with permission from the parents (rarely a consideration); (2) if the child passes a rigorous examination in Spanish. (The examination is so difficult that many Spanish-speaking teachers told me they might fail it.)

Once, when teaching at Betty Plensencia Avenue School, I asked a teacher at lunch what she thought of the bilingual system. Fear came over her face and she whispered, "We have a principal who is very pro-bilingual and I can't say anything bad about the bilingual system or I might get fired."

One day I was called to Solono Avenue, a school I had never been to before. It turned out to be a first-grade class, with a good mix of Asian and Hispanic students. Literally, every first- grader in that class could read English out loud proficiently. I gave them a follow-up writing assignment, and couldn't get over how bright and articulate they were. During the break, I asked the other teachers if I had been assigned to a gifted class. I will never forget their reaction: They all laughed at me! They said that I was teaching at an all-English-speaking school, and that I had actually been in a slow-learning class. I have yet to experience another first-grade class that is so adept and articulate.

Advocates for the bilingual system claim that the system helps the children's self-esteem. In reality, it helps the child's "comfort," but rarely his or her long-term self-esteem. This is evident not only in the high dropout rate among Hispanics, but in the fact that as they grow older these children realize the importance of speaking English. My observation is that because of safe harboring in the bilingual system, these students actually exhibit lower self-esteem.

What many people fail to realize is the power of one language. The strength is in the unity it creates. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. It's not bad to know and to speak more than one language. But when a bilingual system creates separate pockets of people in American society, then we are no longer a melting pot but something closer to a a boiling stew, ready to explode through the heat of prejudice, miscommunication, economic and social fragmentation. A common language is a remarkable social inheritance. Perhaps James A. Michener said it best through his character Roy Aspen in the 1985 novel, *Texas*: "For a nation like the United States, which has a workable central tongue used by many countries around the world, consciously to introduce linguistic separatism and to encourage it by the expenditure of public funds is to create and encourage a danger which could, in time, destroy this nation as

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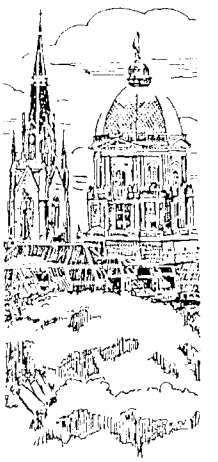

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other nations with linguistic problems have been destroyed."

In the fast-paced world of tomorrow, today's students will need to be able to write and speak with fluency if they are to compete. They will need to be able to complete a detailed application to get into college or to get a job; they will need to be able to speak well enough to complain about an injustice or to express their views credibly. They will need all these if they are to have a reasonable hope of enriching their lives. Instead, the LAUSD is graduating an over-abundance of ill-prepared, future low-income wage earners. JACK FREIBERGER

Jack Freiberger is a free-lance writer who lives in Studio City, California.

REPORT FROM KANSAS

A CALLING SANS BENEFITS

ALL WORK & NO PAY

Let's talk cash.

It's not that I don't like my job; I do. I teach! I conduct college English courses of many descriptions for everyone from freshmen to seniors. I get to read books for a living and help students compose clear prose! Every semester, my students amaze me with their diligence, creativity, and kindness. And my evaluations are positive; one school put me in the top 10 percent of all composition instructors. I'm a happy twenty-five-year-old: Give me a studio apartment and some pizza and I'm all right.

So I feel sheepish about mentioning this, especially in tough times, but...Could I Please Have a Raise?

It's embarrassing to discuss one's finances; I do it only for the larger good. Let's look at some numbers.

According to the *Kansas City Star* (September 13, 1993), local high-school and elementary teachers make about $32,587 a year. They receive health insurance and other benefits. Some must dodge bullets, it's true, but you can't have everything. Their college counterparts do well, also. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 25, 1993), the average pay of a full-time professor at a four-year school is $56,658; at a two-year school it runs $45,412; associate professors get $47,432 and $38,040 respectively; assistant professors, $35,511 and $32,671; and instructors, $26,129 and $28,637. I know what you are thinking: "To blazes with MTV. The real money's in college teaching!" But this happy tale has a dark side. Consider part-time college English instructors.

They want full-time work. They teach four to six classes per semester, which means they work anywhere from forty to sixty to eighty hours per week. (Many of their full-time colleagues teach zero to three classes.) Part-timers teach 33 to 66 percent of all classes offered; more on this later. Before taxes, part-timers make between $11,568 and $17,352 per year. (One of my schools pays $1,446 per class per semester. If a part-timer teaches eight classes a year, he or she receives $11,568; twelve classes equals $17, 352.) I teach four classes per semester, work about fifty hours a week, and can expect to make around $13,014 this year. Financially, I'm in the median among my area counterparts.

While an undergraduate at a "teaching" college in Iowa, I found that most of my instructors set fire to my passion to learn and demonstrated how to be a devoted teacher. Now I find I am aggravated by tenured, PC professors who supposedly adore fairness and compassion but sock away the dough and perks without a thought of those who are carrying the daily load. As Economics 101 will tell you, low, part-time salaries help pay for full-timers' health insurance. (But that information may be biased; Econ 101 is probably taught by a part-timer.)

Everyone knows that America's schools are in serious trouble. Everyone, it seems, but those tenured professors who absorb high salaries while doing little teaching. Who knows? Perhaps college students would learn more if their teachers in their basic courses (Composition I and II, Algebra, U.S. History, etc.) were more fairly compensated. Such compensation might help part-timers quit their second jobs and allow them to spend more time grading papers and making creative lesson plans.

How many part-timers are there? At my community college, which has 27,000-plus students, the communications department has 47 full-timers and 122 part-timers, many of whom want full-time work. My second job, at a local university, appears to have the same ratio of full-timers to part-timers. When I was a teaching assistant (1990-92), most of the sections of Comp I and II were taught by people making about $7,600 a year. (This figure did not include roughly $2,500-worth of free tuition each semester.) Nationwide, I would be surprised if there were much deviance from these figures. The real story is that at least half of all college classes are being taught by people working over fifty hours per week for less than $15,000 per year with no benefits.

Higher education is rife with problems: the ridiculous emphasis placed on publishing tangled jargon in obscure journals; the view that teaching impedes research; the PC debacle; the high costs and diminishing returns. But a huge question, currently unaddressed, remains: When are we going to send the message to students that teaching is a noble profession? I'm convinced that part of the reason students don't learn (aside from broken families, drugs, and other social calamities) is that America is telling them—via their teachers' paychecks—that educators—and thus education—really aren't worth much.

In all honesty, my life is a good one. Money aside, I have a great family, wonderful friends, and a B.A. in math that will help me find a more remunerative career. For me, money is only a means to an end: I'd like to marry some day and not subject my future family to poverty. But the real problem is a larger one and it belongs to the whole country.

A recent government study indicated that almost 50 percent of adults have poor reading and math skills. How will America be able to compete in the global economy with such a deficient work force? The citizenry won't get any smarter if low teacher salaries continue to drive our brightest and most ambitious teachers into other professions.

My wonderful jobs, with their high psychic rewards, are lux-

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uries for me. But there are other avenues for volunteer work, and I may be forced to make my contribution in another way. To be competitive in the information age, however, the United States will need expert teachers. The prospects for encouraging and retaining them look less bright all the time.

TIM WUEBKER

Tim Wuebker lives in Mission, Kansas. He is working on a novel and a play.

OF SEVERAL MINDS Edward Gaffney, Jr.

AN ADAMS CHRONICLE

TALKING ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND

Last fall in these pages I suggested that the Supreme Court would not find it easy this term to dispose of the claim that the National Organization of Women had brought in the *Scheidler* case ("Anti-abortion Racketeers?" November 5, 1993). The case involved the application of the federal antiracketeering law to abortion protesters. I was wrong. The Court ruled promptly and unanimously that the RICO statute does not require any showing of an economic motive behind acts that a RICO plaintiff might complain about.

I suggested in that column: "There is and there ought to be a lot of room in the law between activity that is unqualifiedly protected under the First Amendment and activity that is severely punished under a federal statute in which Congress took aim at organized crime." I don't exactly have to eat this sentence yet, because the Court put off until another day any question relating to the First Amendment, noting that this issue had not been raised properly in the Court of Appeals. I can hardly wait until the Court gets such a case to resolve the matter in a tidy fashion. Meantime, if you see any not-for-profit racketeers in your neighborhood, it may comfort you to know that you can turn them in at your local federal courthouse. I take comfort from the characterization of a whole line of Supreme Court cases as "getting it wrong by making it look easy," which Justice Antonin Scalia once wrote when he was still a law professor at the University of Chicago.

Having failed as a prognosticator of Supreme Court cases, I turn to the easier tasks of predicting the future of Northern Ireland. Last December the British government agreed to a Joint Declaration with the Irish government that offered a window of opportunity for change in "John

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Bull's Other Island," as Shaw once described Ireland. In the Downing Street Declaration, Prime Minister John Major and the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, reached a new level of accord. Britain stated for the first time that it had no interest in keeping Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, if a majority of the citizens in the North wished another form of government. And Ireland said it would not force people in the North to become part of the Republic if they did not want that solution. The primate of Ireland, Cardinal Cahal Daly, hailed the declaration as a "model of balance and fairness." Reynolds called it "the most important policy statement on Northern Ireland in the last seventy years." The commitments in the declaration require a lot more elaboration before "peace in our time" will break out in "that dear old Irish land across the sea." For that very reason, on February 1, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy sponsored a conference on Northern Ireland at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Gerry Adams stole the spotlight in the media. Assume the jurisdictional validity, if not the policy wisdom, of the partition of Ireland into two separate sovereignties. That makes Adams a citizen of the United Kingdom, however he might wish things otherwise. And in his own country he is banned from speaking publicly about issues of public concern because of the perceived connection between the political organization he heads, Sinn Féin, and the paramilitary organization, the Provisional IRA. Indeed, until last January Mother England was even able to extend the force of this ban to our own country, which repeatedly refused Adams a visa to come here to speak about the future of his country. When the Clinton administration momentarily relaxed this ban and granted Adams a visa for forty-eight hours to attend the New York event, it was a victory for the open discussion of ideas.

The very presence of Gerry Adams on American soil to give his version of the meaning of the declaration was enough to provoke an angry outburst from the Brits, who did not miss the opportunity to condemn Adams as a terrorist. The irony of doing so in our nation's capital not only overlooked the tradition of free speech that is one of the most precious fruits of our separation from England two centuries ago. It also occurred at the very place where Yasser Arafat recently extended his hand to Yitzhak Rabin, and at the very moment when Adams was acknowledging his duty to make peace with those who pulled the trigger to shoot him and to bomb his home, and when he was pledging Sinn Féin's "firm intention to see the gun removed permanently from Irish politics."

What the media coverage of this event missed was the historic encounter between Gerry Adams and John Alderdice. Adams needed no introduction to the New York Irish as the leader of Sinn Féin, but who is Alderdice? A psychiatrist who is the son of a Presbyterian preacher, Alderdice chairs the Alliance party, a small but radically different group of Unionists desiring both to remain within the United Kingdom and to find a way to live at peace with their neighbors. In many ways Alderdice deserved a lot more credit for showing up at the New York conference, because he now has to answer to his party members for consorting publicly with Adams. Alderdice gave a moving account of the dysfunctionality of the family that lives in the northern part of Ireland, and an eloquent plea for moving beyond these deep divisions to a saner, or at least a less insane, way of relating to one another.

The media also missed the thoughtful comments of John Hume, the leader of the Social Democratic and Labor party (SDLP), who has been at this task of reconciliation for two decades now. It was he who broke the Adams taboo by opening discussions with him last year. The Hume-Adams dialogue led in turn to a round of secret meetings between Adams and the highest level of the British government. With the public disclosure of the mere fact that any meeting had occurred, let alone that the meetings involved substantive discussion of alternative paths for the future of Northern Ireland, the British government first tried denial, and then it played the Orange card one more time. Hume noted that the partition of Ireland did not cause the Irish problem, it only institutionalized it; and he challenged both Unionists and Nationalists alike to repudiate the violence that only makes the problem worse.

I have no prediction about the resolution of the so-called "Irish question" (which is no more a real question for the Irish than the "Jewish question" was a question for the Jews). It does, however, seem to me that the only way that there will be a just and lasting peace in this troubled region is for all of the parties to come together at a conference table—maybe in some remote village in northern Norway, rather than under the glare of television cameras in New York—at which all of the difficult issues are discussed freely and resolved thoughtfully. One of the disappointments of the Waldorf conference is that neither James Molyneaux, chair of the Ulster Unionist party, nor the Reverend Ian Paisley, chair of the Democratic Unionist party, was willing to attend a conference where Mr. Adams would be present. Whether or not the present window of opportunity is seized by the disputing parties, or, indeed, whether or not the dream of peace with justice in Ireland becomes a reality in my lifetime, we can all be grateful to the sponsors of the historic Waldorf conference for moving the process at least one step further toward resolution. □

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CATHOLIC SCHOOL OWNED BY LAY PEOPLE!

DONALD HUBERT & HALES HIGH

JIM BOWMAN

Hales Franciscan High School on Chicago's South Side is black, all-boys, and Catholic. The Archdiocese of Chicago and the Franciscans sponsor it, identify with it, consider it part of the Catholic fold. But ownership is in the hands of a mostly lay board of eighteen trustees, and with them the buck stops. Hales is the only officially recognized Catholic high school in the United States thus owned.

At the center of this novel arrangement is a Hales graduate, Donald Hubert '66, a Chicago lawyer, member of the school's first four-year graduating class, and otherwise a totally Catholic-school product from primary school to Loyola University, right up to law school at the University of Michigan.

Hubert is an African-American from birth and Catholic from shortly thereafter. For him the Hales story is personal, life-changing, maybe even life-saving. He grew up in gangland Chicago, in the Rangers and Disciples rather than the Capone and Accardo tradition. As a kid on the South Side, he had Rangers to the north of him and Disciples to the south. A young man walked, shall we say, a fine line between the two, carefully and prudently. Hubert went to several grade schools—Saint Anselm, Saint Martin, Our Lady of Solace—and came time for high school, he was off to Hales, newly established in a black neighborhood, at 49th and Cottage Grove.

The ground was hallowed already, by decades of Sisters of Mercy presence. Their Saint Xavier's College (later university) had moved south and west to bigger and greener pastures in an area annexed for their purposes by the City of Chicago—that's how things happen in this Catholic city of cities.

Meanwhile back at 49th and Cottage: The Saint Louis-based Franciscans had a two-year, co-ed parish high school at nearby Corpus Christi. Seven priests, four sisters, and two (count 'em) lay teachers taught in this school at its peak enrollment of 385. The sisters left in 1957 and the place became a four-year, all-boys school. The Franciscans pitched the archdiocese for the nine acres vacated by the Mercys. The archdiocese gave them the land and put up $1 million to build the school. The resultant Hales Franciscan High School opened in the fall of 1962.

It was built for 600 and peaked at 550. Catholic school superintendent, Monsignor William E. McManus, later bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, and Cardinal-Archbishop Albert G. Meyer, Chicago's Old Milwaukee import, signed the papers. McManus called it "hallowed ground," again serving "the people of the neighborhood by giving its young men high-quality Catholic education."

One of them was Don Hubert, who did time as a stock boy at Del Farm grocery, at 63rd and what's now Martin Luther King Drive, rather than at the Audy Home or Saint Charles—two options for teen-age offenders then and now. He thought that was what every kid did, work full-time at a grocery while attending high school. He did his homework when he got home at midnight and on weekends.

Donald Hubert

JIM BOWMAN, *a Chicago newsman, is the author of* Bending the Rules: What American Priests Tell American Catholics, *due out in June from Crossroad.*

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For two years, he played four sports, then took on the grocery job. Hales had a drama program under Father Barry Schneider, whose *African Hamlet* barnstormed in the Midwest. Hubert played the prince's father. One of the stops was Carleton College, in Northfield, Minnesota, where white families took the kids in overnight, providing a strange and wonderful experience for the young black men of Hales, as Hubert recalls it.

He talks about it in his law office on the thirty-ninth floor of a nicely preserved tower building with elevator operators across Randolph Street from the Bismarck Hotel, "the Vatican of Chicago politics." At the University of Michigan Law School he pulled average-good grades but did better than average in corporate law. He figures he might have gone into that esoteric branch of the profession if he were white. But as an alumnus not only of Hales but of the Woodlawn neighborhood, he went for the gold buried in criminal work, moving eventually to "complex civil litigation."

He even got political work, from Cook County Board President George Dunne and later from Harold Washington's mayoral administration as well. (Dunne, a durable Irishman, was a solid supporter of Harold Washington.) This is how it works, of course. Winners divide spoils here as in most places.

And old boys look after other old boys. Which brings Hubert round to the Hales question. He was a loyal alumnus of the school when the wolf came knocking at its door in 1989. The archdiocese, increasingly handling nickels like sewer covers, told him, $82,000 by tomorrow, or the school closes. Hubert forked over the $82,000. The wolf went away, but it went away hungry.

Hubert and his "acting board of regents" set about raising the required cash and did rather well for a couple years, hosting a "classic Black" benefit at Orchestra Hall, a black-tie affair featuring singer Nancy Wilson and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. More to the point, the school got $500,000 in a matching grant from G.D. Searle & Company, whose CEO read of its plight in the newspaper.

The plan was to make those regents trustees of their own institution, and that's what happened in July 1993. Enrollment is up, to almost 400 boys. Tuition is $2,800, 60 percent of the going rate in today's market. It can't go any higher because the students' "socioeconomic" profile, to use Hubert's word, sets a limit. You can price yourself out of the market Hales has a niche in, rather a corner on, as quickly as you could end up on the wrong side of the law if you grew up at 63rd and Ellis.

He's on the law side of the law now, smiling and outgoing, with associates working busily in his law office. He's dressed for the Daley Center courtrooms, a few blocks away, and leaves the interview for a while to make a necessary appearance.

Yes, he does feel about being African-American, Catholic, and a responsible citizen, he said when he returned, as he felt a few years earlier, when he had expatiated on those issues in the same tidy office for the same writer. At the time, he had recently visited Ghana's Accra castle, where he'd seen the holding pens for blacks before being loaded into the holds of slave ships, "like Jews going to Auschwitz." It was a shocker for him. And it was not so long ago at that, two hundred years or so. Two hundred years to catch on to European ways? Not much time, when you consider it. The pushy ones were muzzled, literally, with contraptions on display at Accra castle. You were an up-and-comer, you got muzzled. Not a formula for success.

But "we can't cry in our milk," he says. "We have to develop a family system and values and get the best education possible." We have to make the institutions in our neighborhoods reflect those values. I ask myself what I can do to make other African-Americans strong." Among other projects, he works with black lawyers who are sometimes loaded down with "nickel-and-dime" cases which they neglect. It's no way to make a living or a career. He tells them that.

"I have paid my dues," he said, taking another tack. "But American society never really accepted us as full dues-paying members."

Another: "We [blacks] live in a society that's color blind but we are not ready to take advantage of it. In many organizations, I'm the only black. Black men in such groups are neglected. It's not that simple, to take advantage of the opportunity.

"No millions were spent for education of freed slave kids. How then do whites expect us to have their values?"

So look to black institutions. "But when black institutions grow strong, they move to mainstream culture," leaving other blacks behind. "Hales once had 550 students. They needed a trailer in the school yard to handle the overflow. The whites moved to the suburbs, athletics got bigger, and blacks were recruited by white high schools."

The issue? "What whites take for granted is not there for blacks—an educated populace where the family is the central unit. At Hales we isolate the boys, we tell them they count, we say they can make it. They come from an environment that says they can't make it. We tell them different."

White folks? "Everybody must give back to the communi-

Virginia V. Hlavsa

Obligations

There is a house I must often pass, so
ugly—yellow with black spots and stone lions
and retread planters—I have trained my eye
to look across the road or up or down
or anywhere but there or it will fix
itself on my mind like the lunchroom sight
of other kids' uneaten crusts would make
me gag with poor-child obligation. Bad
enough when winter-bare, it's worse in spring
or fall, for then, in front, a sweet young tree,
filigreed, wild, raises its slender arms, reddens
its tender leaves, pointing out, pointing in.

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ty that nurtured him. Don't call whites racists. They are doing for their institutions, their children. Whites are discriminated against too, for many reasons: too fat, too short, and so on. We [blacks] are so absorbed [in our problems], we forget it's not easy out there for anybody."

When it came to the 1989 crunch, he put it to himself: "Hales close? Ridiculous. What would that do to the fabric of the neighborhood?" Now, with trustees in place and enrollment up and enthusiasm rife, he looks at the scruffy grounds and pictures what grassy knolls and well-kept trees would do for the neighborhood.

And the stopper: "Why should black kids have to leave their neighborhood for better schools?"

Students with Charles Payne, O.F.M.

Talking a few years back to public school principals visiting Hales, Hubert made the point about not turning away from his origins: he hadn't moved to a white neighborhood, he hadn't dated white women, because he believed in "anchoring" himself within the community. That was why he gave Hales the money. It was why he kept coming back to his alma mater, to the place that had nurtured him and given him a home away from home.

"We need institutions," he told the principals. "Mom and Dad can't do it alone. We need stronger focus on the family unit, more dialogue between black men and women. I don't know where we are to start to become anchored. I have decided on defined limits, so I turn to my high school as Mayor [Richard M.] Daley turns to his, De La Salle High School, making sure they get jobs. White males are buddies with each other. I tell kids at Hales, you are part of a gang, stick together."

Still, Hales is not an only-black thing. One of its new trustees is H. Dennis O'Neill, an Evanston bank executive, whom Hubert touts as "a great find for Hales," himself from a Catholic boys' school back East, where he has helped raise "substantial sums" for Catholic schools.

Chicago is a good place for Catholic fund-raising. The only problem is, there's so much of it. But Hubert turns to white lawyers who are Catholic, and they help out. He's a bar association officer. It's one of those organizations he has joined to find himself one of very few blacks. (He also belongs to another, mostly black bar group.) He's gotten used to that. But he'd rather not ask the same of young black men on their way up.

The 380 or so Hales students have him to look up to and will have each other to look out for in the years to come, as the mayor's De La Salle buddies have each other to look out for.

Hales students also have a distinguished African-American president to look up to. He's the Reverend Charles Payne, a Jungian psychotherapist and one of a half-dozen Franciscans on the staff. Father Charles, as the Franciscans say it, is one of three black-priest Ph.D. psychologists in the United States. As a child in his native Tennessee, he rode in the back of segregated buses and trains. From Detroit, where he grew up, he joined the Army and saw Germany; there he decided to join a religious order. The representative of one discouraged him (it was the early '60s) but steered him to the Franciscans, who welcomed him, dark skin and all.

Father Payne could tell the visiting principals it was time "we," meaning the black community, took responsibility for Hales, until then borne by the Franciscans. The role-model concept operates. Payne remembers being "shocked" years ago to find a black president at Grambling University. He's the first black president of Hales. Hubert is an obvious role model. The school's black teachers are too, on a day-to-day basis. Ever the counselor, Payne speaks of degrees of "transference." "Students figure, if they did it, I can do it."

Sounds simple, and the formula is an old one. Indeed, the observer at Hales is tempted to say, "If you've seen one Catholic boys' school, you've seen them all." Boys raise their hands eager to answer, boys sleep in class, boys listen, boys push and shove, boys get serious, boys get comical. One said he had learned about black saints and three black popes (!) at Hales. Another said he had heard that Jesus lived near Egypt, a center of black African culture. Another said he had come to Hales because of its black male teachers, to hear of "obstacles [they had] overcome." Such as discrimination? he was asked. But the kid shook his head. It wasn't his focus at all.

Survival is still a problem. Hales depends upon its friends. These are not all black. It's a Catholic school, after all, and this is Chicago. There's an annual walkathon, an "ad book," and a few thousand here and there from the archdiocese's Big Shoulders Fund. Otherwise, the board, the school's new owners, have a $450,000 annual deficit to meet. For four years, as a board of regents, not yet owners, they have been raising $375,000 a year. Now they have new status, new members, old motivation, and Catholic chutzpah to get them through what Hubert admits is a "very tough" first year.

Meanwhile, it's gap-bridging time, between the $2,800 tuition and the $5,000 or so cost per student. Scholarship aid comes to $150,000 a year for a school of 380 students, which Hubert says is high, citing another boys' school with over twice as many students but only a few thousand more in scholarship money.

"We're working the foundation lineup now," he said. He adapts the late Tip O'Neill quote about all politics being local. "All church is local too," he says. "Look out from the expressway and see the steeples. That's the church out there. We want to keep the church where Hales is now." □

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MISSING MISS MURPHY, STILL

CONFESSIONS OF A TEACHER'S PET

PEGGY ELLSBERG

The town where I grew up was filled with Displaced Persons. Long before I was born, a basic strain of Anglo-Saxon Americans had dominated the town's undistinguished landscape, and to them it owed its imposing public library, its several large stone Protestant churches, and its active chapter of the D.A.R. But in the years following the Great Depression, Italian, Swedish, and Irish farmers moved a few miles into the town to take shift jobs in the factories. And in the decade or so after World War II, Eastern European people displaced by war, starvation, and the reapportioning of borders and of governments flowed like a steady grey river into the rundown neighborhoods around the factories. There, under the scrutiny of my father (who was a farmer and a tool-and-dye maker), sunken-eyed men in thick work pants took their places on the assembly line.

The years that saw this migration also saw the famous postwar baby boom, into the midst of which I was born. Every house on our street had five or seven or nine children. Kids spilled out onto the porches of triple deckers to play jacks, kids rode scooters on sidewalks, kids jumped rope and flipped baseball cards, kids ran between lines of laundry, between rows and rows of freshly boiled diapers.

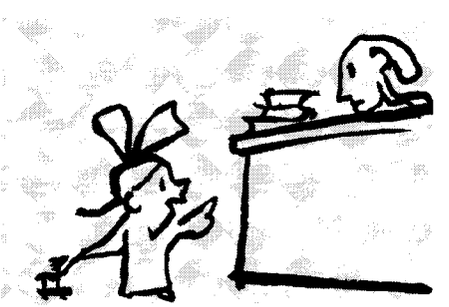
I spent the next two years in baby boom chaos, crowding every morning onto a yellow school bus that reeked of balogna sandwiches and wet wool, and then bumping along for what seemed an eternity in the bedlam of the bus—sneakers and pencil boxes and whatnot flying through the riotous air. School itself lasted exactly one-and-a-half hours. Sixty children squeezed into public schoolrooms meant for twenty-five. Every single day, in first grade, we colored in circles and squares until it was time to get back into the belly of the yellow bus. That kind of schedule was called "split sessions"—five shifts of children used each classroom each day.

And then, when I was seven, a miracle occurred. Lots of new school buildings went up. On the first day of second grade, I walked into a brand-new classroom, fresh and gleaming, with huge windows and blond wood furniture.

There were sixteen children in Miss Josephine Murphy's second grade, and on the very first day of school she invited me to come and sit beside her at her desk, where she immediately taught me how to read. "This," she said, choosing letters from a small movable alphabet, "spells horse. And if you change this letter, it spells house." By the next day, I could read a whole book, about a girl named Susan who had a pet rabbit.

Miss Murphy wore dark grey serge suits and dark grey hair pulled back into a bun. By the end of each day her hair would be hanging in strands about her shoulders and her cheeks would be bright pink. She would personally excuse the whole class from gym so that we could go into the woods behind the school and run in the autumn leaves.

Miss Murphy taught us everything. She taught us which foods we should eat, and how we should sit, and how we should be in bed each night by 7:30. She taught us how to tell time, and how to walk like a flock of ducks and how to recite "Tell me not in mournful numbers/Life is but an empty dream." She sang to us arias from Italian operas, and composed a special song just for our class, to be performed by us for the whole school and even for some policemen at a safety day assembly. I can still sing that song, thirty-seven years later—its theme was the importance of looking both ways before crossing the street.



Two days before Christmas, Miss Murphy's classroom was paid a special visit by Santa Claus. Santa walked among our desks, giving each of us a candy cane and a popcorn ball tied up with red or green cellophane. To the whole class Santa presented a large wrapped box. Who would be chosen to come forward and open it? My heart pounded with yearning. Oh please, please let it be me! Miss Murphy's knuckle tapped me smartly on the head—"Miss Peggy to the front and open the present that Santa brought to the whole class!" I so wanted to be, I just had to be, and now I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was, Miss Murphy's favorite. I tore the paper from the gift. It was a wooden ice cream maker with a hand crank.

As the class was filing to the coat room, popcorn balls crinkling, to put on their snowsuits for the long trek home toward Christmas eve, Miss Murphy beckoned me to her desk, the desk where I had learned to read a few months before. She handed me a small, slim package in silver wrapping. "Go ahead, open it," she said. I opened the present: it was an orange mechanical pencil. "I hope you'll use it to write your first book," she said.

"My teacher loves me," sang my heart, all through the snowy winter. In January Miss Murphy made a huge Chart of

PEGGY ELLSBERG *teaches at Barnard College in New York City.*

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Children's Virtues and hung it in the back of the classroom. For every marvelous act that any child performed, she would put a red check mark next to his or her name. For hair that was especially shiny and well-combed, for hands that stayed nicely folded on top of a child's desk, for letters printed with exquisite neatness on a line, for arithmetic flawlessly figured, for a poem recited by heart, for a show and tell well-delivered; for any of these and other virtues, Miss Murphy rewarded the good child with her sure, firm, stylish, red check mark. A few weeks after the chart went up, I had more red checks than anyone. I was teacher's pet!

On Saint Patrick's Day, late in the afternoon, as delicious green ice cream was being scooped and handed about to the children, Mr. Haggerty, the principal, knocked loudly on the door. Miss Murphy, her hair wild and her cheeks ablaze, jumped a mile and dropped a blob of ice cream on the floor. I stared at it, horror-struck but hungry for it. "Here is a new second-grader," said Mr. Haggerty. "Class, this little boy is named Yasha. Everyone say hello." Every eye was on the ice cream melting on the floor. I could tell by Miss Murphy's sudden lack of composure that she had not expected either Mr. Haggerty or Yasha.

"Oh dear, we don't even have a desk for you! Well, just for today, you sit up in the front with me."

In alphabetical order we all received our ice cream cones, and were licking madly. I was crunching the waffle at the bottom of the cone just moistened with green melt-off, when the letter Z's were finally served. I noticed from my seat in the front row—where I was placed to accommodate my near-sightedness—that there was exactly one serving of ice cream left. Miss Murphy carefully scraped out the bucket and handed the last ice cream cone to Yasha. That meant she had none. "But you have none, Miss Murphy!" I pointed out to her. I looked balefully at the melted pool of ice cream on the floor. "Ah, but I get the best part," she said, "I get to lick the spoon." Yasha was a thin, pale boy with knotted blond hair and colorless lips. He stared for a moment at his cone, and then at the class,

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and from his position of authority at the teacher's big desk, he vomited.

The new boy must have been near-sighted too, because Miss Murphy put his desk right next to mine. "Now you help him, because he has missed a lot of school." I could not believe how dumb Yasha was. He could neither read nor write, his hair was a mess, and he spent almost every afternoon with his head resting upon his arms like a cabbage in a laundry pile, fast asleep. "He's sleeping in school!" I stage-whispered to Miss Murphy. "You just mind your own business, Miss Noseybody!" she responded. I was stung to the core. I spent as much time in the back of the room at the pencil sharpener as I could, trying to sort it out. Yasha did everything wrong and yet Miss Murphy was constantly singling him out for special treatment. One day as I stood grinding my pencil down to nothing at the pencil sharpener, my eyes fell on the Chart of Children's Virtues. After Yasha's name there was a long string of firm red check marks. This was a child who frequently came late to school, who wet his pants, who knew no answers. He had more red check marks than I, teacher's pet! My head pounding with outrage, I quickly decided to take justice into my own hands. I pressed myself almost flat against the Chart of Children's Virtues, and madly, and with a kind of moral abandon, ticked off a dozen or so check marks next to my own name. I ticked them in my childish hand, and in plain graphite, but tick I felt I must. Justice would prevail.

On Easter Monday there was a spelling bee. I won with "sauce." I won an Easter toy: a tiny yellow fur chick. As I bore my prize home that day, I spotted Yasha getting into Miss Murphy's car. Suddenly the toy chick turned insignificant in my hands. He was riding in her car, in her beautiful grey car the same color as her beautiful grey suit. Where on earth could they be going! I walked my usual route in an agony of unrequited love and jealous grief.

That night at supper it was announced that Miss Murphy had brought a dirty little boy into the children's shoe store, where my brother worked after school. He said she appeared to be buying him shoes, and that there was a lollipop involved. I burst into tears at the supper table, and could not be consoled.

In May Miss Murphy strode to the back of the room and untacked the Chart of Children's Virtues from the wall. Inside my head I heard drum rolls. Her plan was to choose the most virtuous child, based on the number of red check marks. She would invite the winner home with her that night for a special dinner with her and her sister Bridget.

I could hardly breathe. Of course I would be chosen—over the past month I had surreptitiously added several scores of check marks to my name. What would we eat? Would there be cake? The joy was too intense.

The drum was still rolling when she announced that Yasha was the winner. In that schoolroom full of immigrant children, I seemed to have been the only one who had aspired—who had hoped—who had prayed—who had cheated—and my disappointment was all but unendurable.

Yasha slept that night at Miss Murphy's house, and every night for a week or so after, and then he disappeared. He just failed to come to school one day, and his empty desk sat there next to me. Its emptiness relieved me and confused me.

Sometime after second grade was over and it was summer, my mother told me that a little DP boy named Yasha was in the tuberculosis sanatorium outside of town. His father had just died and now he was an orphan. My mother said we should all pray for him.

Ten years later I brought my orange mechanical pencil to college with me. That December my mother sent me a clipping from our hometown paper. It was Miss Josephine Murphy's obituary. She had died, age sixty-one, from cancer. She was survived by her sister.

As I sat in my college dormitory room, with snow falling in a dismal fashion outside my high grey windows, reading my mail, I thought of Miss Murphy dancing us all about the second grade room. And I thought of the noon whistle, and the factories, and all the human heads bowed in sorrow and dignity over their lost homes and their fullness of hope. And for the rest of that day I felt a little displaced myself. □

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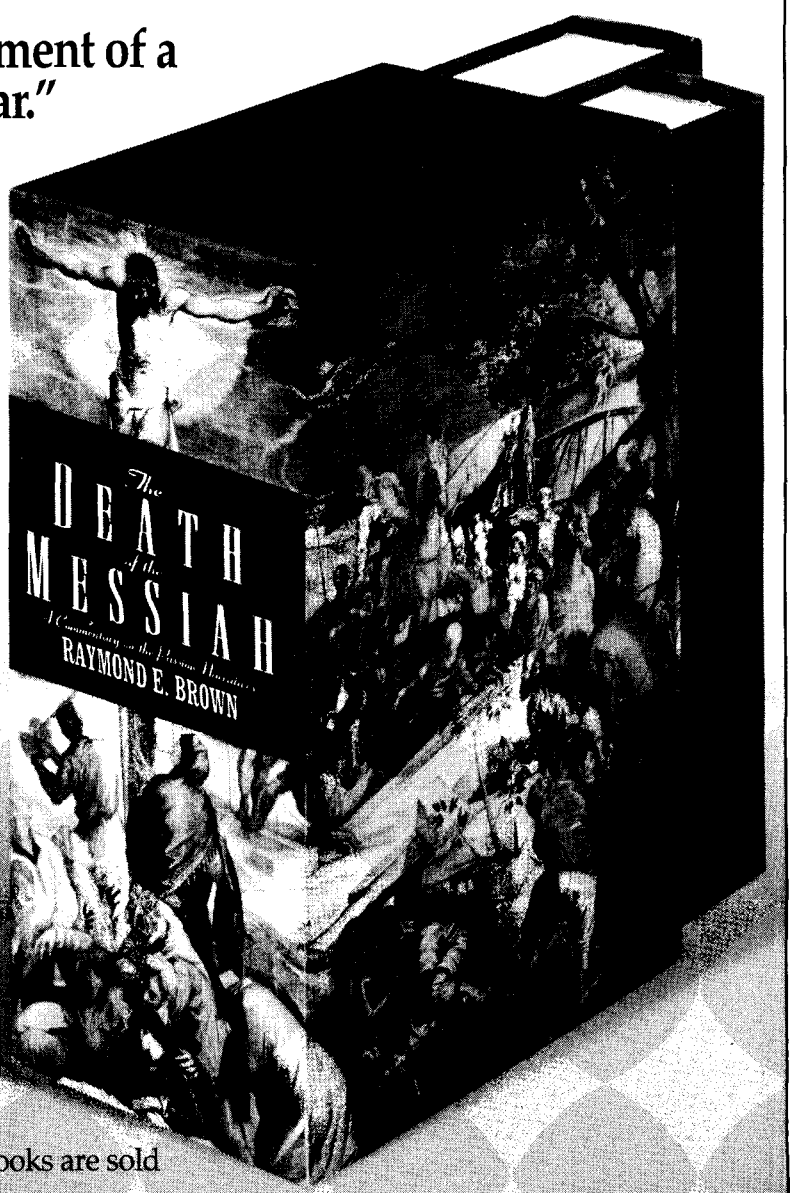

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The good news schools

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE COMMON GOOD
Anthony S. Bryk, Valerie E. Lee, and Peter B. Holland
Harvard University Press, $37.50, 432 pp.

John T. McGreevy

Even those familiar with Catholic education find the statistics startling. In 1965, over 13,000 Catholic schools enrolled 5.5 million students, 12 percent of the national total. Fast forward a generation. This fall, only 2.5 million pupils entered the doors of fewer than 8,500 Catholic schools; schools that will educate perhaps 5 percent of the nation's school-age population.

The appearance of *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* in this context is not without irony. The central argument of this clearly written, superbly researched effort is that the nation's public high schools need to mimic their Catholic counterparts. Catholic high schools, according to the authors, "manage simultaneously to achieve relatively high levels of student learning, distribute this learning more equitably with regard to race and class than in the public sector, and sustain high levels of teacher commitment and student engagement."

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The book can be viewed as a capstone to a remarkable decade of research on Catholic schools, much of it done by non-Catholic academics working in leading education schools and sociology departments. The terrain covered by this literature is a bloodied one, since as the combatants acknowledge, the research has important implications for the intertwined issues of poverty, social mobility, and in the public-policy arena, school vouchers. Melding careful case studies with sophisticated analyses of student achievement data, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* builds upon claims initially made by James Coleman and Andrew Greeley. Perhaps most important, the authors maintain that Catholic schools are particularly effective with low-income African-American and Latino students, and that this achievement does not depend upon the ejection of particular students from the schools or a self-selected group of families already willing to pay for their children's education.

Instead, the authors stress the transformative effect of what might be called the culture of Catholic high schools. Education is educational. In the least effective public high schools, students learn to view school as an endless series of consumer choices (that is, classes) made amidst an impersonal bureaucracy. By contrast, the Catholic schools examined by the authors emphasize the ability of all students to complete a college-prep curriculum and self-consciously work at establishing a more communal environment. The best Catholic schools encourage students and teachers to view academic success as a joint (and moral) endeavor; too many public schools emphasize individual achievement and teacher specialization at the expense of shared responsibility.

The novelty of these claims in the sweep of American educational history is worth

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emphasizing. Until recently, researchers simply assumed that Catholic schools achieved, at best, pietistic mediocrity. John Dewey, who in a 1947 fit of pique termed the Catholic church a "powerful, reactionary world organization....inimical to democracy" would presumably be stunned to find parallels drawn between his own educational vision and that of the Catholic "common school."

Why, then, don't school boards, principals, and the larger public seize upon these results and revamp a system failing to serve many American students? The authors view this as their goal, and argue that lessons learned in Catholic schools are transferrable to the public sector. The position is an optimistic one. Technical solutions—such as smaller class sizes and greater teacher autonomy—only work in particular contexts. The recent fixation on computers in the classroom, for example, has often simply meant that lesson plans done on the blackboard get transferred to terminals, with predictably disappointing results. For the most part, the authors themselves make this point, emphasizing the importance of Vatican II and shared faith commitments in creating the "communal organization" necessary for educational success. They also commend service requirements, liturgies, and student retreats as valuable "occasion[s] for teaching."

The problem is that the authors' laudable desire for moral education tends to obscure the fact that Catholic schools emerge from a definable religious tradition. Catholic teaching as defined here is remarkably uncontroversial. Catholic schools are applauded for not becoming "sectarian" and Catholic schools of the 1950s and early 1960s are casually dismissed as "closed, doctrinaire, and austere...." (From where, then, did the leaders of today's Catholic schools emerge?) Somber warnings are given against "Anything that even remotely smacks of 'indoctrination in the mind of the church....' The tension here is that the same Catholic teaching (or "indoctrination") producing successful educational communities and advocating social justice also refuses, for example, to allow the distribution of condoms in its elementary schools. Theology matters. The thousands of excellent public schools acknowledge this, and develop a sort of hidden moral curriculum, but this task is increasingly challenging in a more pluralistic society. Calling for a "prophetic force" to spur discussions of moral education in the public schools is admirable; expecting that discussion not to replicate the moral diversity of our society is unwarranted. An implicit recognition of this difficulty may explain the reluctant recommendation in the final chapter for some form of school vouchers.

For Catholics, the meaning of studies like this one is ambiguous. Clearly another potent weapon now exists for hard-pressed Catholic school administrators seeking corporate or foundation support. Let's hope it works. Plaudits from social scientists, however, can carry the Catholic community only so far. Thirty years ago, in her eloquent manifesto, *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?*, Mary Perkins Ryan correctly argued that the schools should exist only insofar as they properly form Catholic adults and support the educational mission of the church. (And one of her

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most persuasive pleas was for new emphasis on Catholic students in public schools.) Ryan later conceded that abandoning Catholic schools for, say, renewed emphasis on the liturgy, was naive, but her instincts were shrewd. It is not sufficient, although it is necessary, to manage good schools. If it were, the bishops could purchase Phillips Exeter.

The evidence presented in *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* concerning the integration of religion and education is largely positive. Teachers in inner-city Catholic schools (often with largely non-Catholic student bodies), for example, are clearly serving the world in ways envisioned at Vatican II. Less impoverished schools struggle to engage students with Catholic thought on a wide range of matters, including a sense of justice more enduring than *noblesse oblige*.

Still, hints of future turmoil are peppered throughout the text. Unlike Catholic grade schools, Catholic high schools in the postwar era established only tenuous ties to parish life. As costs rise, the schools become evermore dependent on tuition payments—payments that might tempt administrators to tailor curriculums and goals to the demands of affluent, non-Catholic students and parents. To the extent that "religion"—meaning liturgy, excellence in theological instruction, and commitment to social justice—moves to the periphery, so too might the specifically Catholic character of the institution, and the rationale for continued church support. The parish council or religious order asked (at great sacrifice) to support a barely Catholic school might legitimately ask whether funds and personnel could better be used elsewhere.

But on this matter, too, *Catholics Schools and the Common Good* can be seen to bring good news. The same Catholic practices so difficult to sustain outside particular moral traditions are, in good measure, responsible for the excellence that prompted studies of Catholic education in the first place. □

BUNGLE IN THE JUNGLE

BRAZIL
John Updike
Knopf, $23, 260 pp.

Rand Richards Cooper

Quick: Guess which well-known American novelist has set his current book in South America, taking us through the hard slums of Rio and into the jungle for mischief with gold-mining desperadoes, mysterious Indio shamans, and murderous bands of pilgrims seeking El Dorado? Robert Stone, perhaps? Thomas Pynchon? Who's that creeping through the underbrush? Paul Theroux?

Nope, not this time. This time the surprise adventurer is none other than...John Updike. That's right, America's most literate suburbanite has traveled south and returned with *Brazil*, a sprawling tropical version of an old romantic legend. The novel follows the amorous adventures of Tristao, son of an Afro-Brazilian whore, a petty thief wasting his youth in "a constant scurry and hustle, propelled by his empty stomach." One fine day on the beach, this Tristan spots his Iseult—Isabel, a beautiful white girl of the remote upper classes. Poor boy and rich girl commence their ill-starred romance, and Updike sets us off on a bumpy three-decade journey.

John Updike would seem an unlikely author for *Brazil*, with its expansive chronological sweep, conspicuous lack of North Americans, and flirtations with the supernatural twists of magical realism. To be sure, the novel bears its author's hallmark attention to details, creating a world lavish with the authentic, from the names of Brazilian pop stars to the exact amount of torque exerted on VW brake-plate bolts on the auto assembly line where Tristao briefly

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labors. But *Brazil* opens with an uncharacteristic taleteller's flourish—"One day not long after Christmas Day years ago..."—and fans of Updike begin the novel with an excited, nervous sense of the author pushing new boundaries and challenges.

Alas, the experiment is a disaster. For every two things that succeed in *Brazil*, five fail, and fail explosively. First of all there's the ornate and archaic diction given to the novel's characters. The idea seems to have been to suggest translation from another language and culture, but the result is stilted in the extreme.

Then there's the sex problem. *Brazil* is unremittingly preoccupied with the meanings and procedures of the sexual act. Tristao and Isabel perform with epic intensity—not to mention frequency and variety—and the novel strains to find a language capable of keeping up. Redolent of the steamy lyricism with which this author has so often pursued the mysteries of female orgasm ("...this flowing outward of love like milk through each pore....This giving, this shedding, this vapor of love arising from the lake of herself..."), *Brazil* adds a weird array of sexual metaphors adapted from the mechanical and vegetable worlds. Tristao, daydreaming about Isabel, reflects upon "her white beauty that slipped through the darkened room like a viscid oil, [and] the lubricated two valves that welcomed his aching yam below...." This is more like cooking than sex; it's Updike as the Galloping Gourmet of erotic literature. Here's Isabel reflecting on male sexuality: "The little male drama of rise and fall was touching, despite men's ability to kill you with their hands, if the evil mood took them. But hers was the women's power to forestall the evil mood. Hers was the power to take all they could give, between her legs." Again and again Updike serves up writing that sounds less like an original effort to imagine how women think about sex than a prefabricated male fantasy of how they think about it; in other words, something like pornography.

Brazil brims with assertions about the respective natures, and powers, of the sexes. Even its geography breaks down into male and female domains: the "sun-parched, masculine scrub" of the plain vs. the "lusher, dimmer, feminine world" of the jungle. The differences between men and women have always formed a chief source of Updike's material, and one senses in his fantasy of Brazil a longing to desert our own increasingly gender-flat country for the hillier and (to him) richer one of patriarchal tradition, where such differences continue to be honored, wondered at, lamented, and practiced. "Women are dirt and water," his shaman pronounces, "men are air and fire." In its devotion to such elemental gender dichotomies, *Brazil* makes a backhanded spiritual argument against Western liberalism, with its leveling egalitarianism. "The heart," Updike writes, "thrives on contrarieties."

Many will read this argument as a simple plea for the good old world of male dominance; and indeed, it's disheartening to find that the novel's ruminations about sexual differences follow bleakly stereotypical lines. "Their uncontrollable moods," the narrator remarks, "are the price men pay for women's unearthly beauty and their habitual pain." "The female need to surrender always troubled his warrior spirit." One expects to en-

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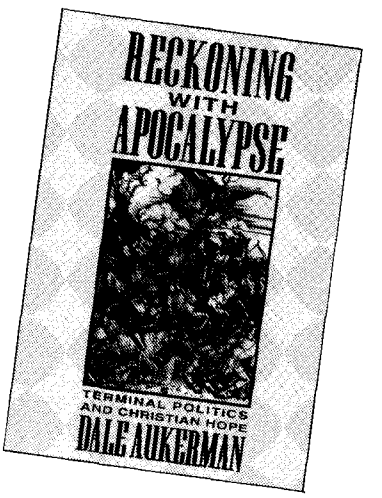

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counter such hackneyed, pseudo-mythic commentary on a bridge in *Madison County*, perhaps, but not in a John Updike novel. The same depressing predictability besets *Brazil*'s treatment of racial contraries. When, in a nod to Latin American magical realism, Updike subjects his lovers to a supernatural transformation of their racial identities, we find that Isabel, now black, becomes lazy and sensual, while Tristao, now white, becomes—surprise!—repressed and intellectual. Here again, the result seems less like a fresh reinvention of a world charged with otherness than an unseemly trafficking in the tired old prejudices of our own.

Brazil is billed as a "novel of erotic joy," and its tropical location and extravagant sensuous freedoms suggest Edenic possibilities. But Updike's idea of a state of nature has always been deeply ambivalent. His *oeuvre* reveals an anxious fascination with the idea of amorality, and an insistence on an underlying human brutality against which the friendly lives and humane attitudes of his own suburban characters appear a kind of wishful, prettifying lie. A wicked desire to get to the dirty truth of things gives such works as *Rabbit Redux* or his essay "On Not Being a Dove" their strange air of edgy loathing, their almost vengeful urge to show the liberals—whether depicted as sheltered, idealistic women or as the good-boy-grown-up, dutiful-husband-and-father part of himself or his male protagonists—that the world isn't really such a nice place after all.

Accordingly, Updike's *Brazil* is a curious paradise, offering liberation not from the spiritual crampedness of modern corporate or bureaucratic life, or from the anonymity of mass consumerism, or even from the sober trade-offs of monogamy and family, but rather, and much more narrowly, from the burdensome propriety of upper-middle American liberalism, with its bromides about racial harmony, concern for the poor, sexual equality, and so on. Where Isak Dinesen's Africa, say, was all about escaping modern mediocrity and retrieving an ancient idea of the noble, Updike's *Brazil* is about escaping the onerous pretense of being—and sounding—moral, of having to say the right things. It is about the freedom to be nasty. "Being a white woman fucked by a black man is more delicious, Isabel had sadly to conclude, than a black woman being fucked by a white man." Updike's gross miscalculation lies in thinking that this kind of "honesty" comes off as exhilaration, a breathtaking throwing-off of taboos, when really it's just plain ugly.

The novel is more than a case of an author's instincts gone awry. Rather, its problems betray difficult paradoxes in Updike's aesthetic *Weltanschauung*. His natural style, as early works such as *Rabbit, Run* or *Of the Farm* show, is metaphysical and celebratory, his writerly temperament rapturous and sad. Over the years, however, these instincts have become joined to a physical, even animal conception of human nature and an increasingly skeptical view of individual spiritual possibility. In a way, Updike is a fundamentally tragic writer who has grown a comic world view and doesn't know what to do with it. There's a moment in *Brazil* when Isabel, having journeyed into the jungle to an Indian shaman, finds herself sitting across from the old man on the floor of his smoky hut, and into the description of the scene is inserted the following curious aside: "In her position her sarong could not cover her underparts, but then why should underparts be hid? Do they not give us our most glorious moments and guide us through life to our fates?"

Nothing could better illustrate the bind Updike currently finds himself in. The scene presents an essentially comic notion—that we are our organs, mere slaves of our desires—and then, instead of playing it for comedy (the naive and willing pilgrim, the goatish old medicine man), gives it a ponderous and wholly inappropriate metaphysical twist. *Brazil* is profound when it should be earthy, and crude when it should be passionate. A haze of the grotesque floats off the surface of its missed intentions, a clanging dislocation of tone and meaning.

Updike's triumph in *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) lay partly in the harmonizing of opposites which tear *Brazil* apart—in the supreme mix of humor and seriousness, comic bounce and tragic sorrow, with which the author bade farewell to the hero of his four-decade tetralogy. For those who have followed this writer's career with admiration and interest, there's a sadness to *Brazil* and its remorseless regimen of sexual calisthenics. What made Updike's writing from the start, and gave him a tang of blasphemy in the distant '50s, was the constant playing off of the spiritual and the sexual against a backdrop of stunned mortality. It was a rich mix of Sex and Death and God. But the latter two seem to have died along with Rabbit Angstrom, dissolving Updike's trinity of subjects and leaving him alone with the body, the body, the body.

And that's not enough. □

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OPERA WITHOUT THE MUSIC

THE GREEN KNIGHT
Iris Murdoch
Viking, $23.95, 472 pp.

Molly Finn

Someone who knew I was reading Iris Murdoch asked me recently if she engages large issues in her novels. Well, she certainly introduces large issues, and she has her characters discuss them at length (and sometimes *ad nauseam*). Abstractions such as good, evil, mystery, and magic, and ideas about history, art, and religion play roles as large as those of the characters. She introduces large issues into the action, too. For example, in *The Green Knight* two of the characters act out a drama of fratricide and, to be sure we don't miss any allusions, we are repeatedly reminded of the story of Cain and Abel. As I read this novel I reminded myself that in Genesis this drama, so vivid and terrible that it still reverberates undiminished, is related in a few lines. Several hundred pages of Murdoch's present-day elaborations on the story offer no new perspectives and reflect none of the power and awe one experiences on reading the Jewish Scripture. If you're going to base a novel on the story of Cain and Abel, you ought to have something of significance to say about it.

Large issues abound; we could say that large issues make up the entire substance of Murdoch's novels. But she does not succeed in engaging these issues. Disengagement is a more characteristic mode, "disembodied" a good description of her characters in these fatally cerebral works. Alasdair MacIntyre comments that Iris Murdoch "...is an author whose project involves an ironic distance not only from her characters but also from herself." What this distance and irony remove from the work is a point of view, a moral context in which the characters and action are given meaning. The author and her characters are all floating in the same ironic soup, in which good, evil, history, art, belief and atheism, religion and magic mingle and merge into one another until the distinctive flavor of each is obliterated. What one of her characters says about himself, many readers might say of the others in the book: "...I have been...in retreat—or in eclipse or in never-never land—somewhere else anyway!"

Perhaps in an attempt to counteract this disembodied quality in her characters, Murdoch describes their physical characteristics repeatedly and in minute detail, with heavy emphasis on hair, eyes, skin color, and clothing. She makes the same effort to give concreteness to physical surroundings—houses, rooms and furniture are prominently present and we are kept very current on the weather. This exercise reveals the author's wit and sharp observations, but fails to animate the puppets she has created.

In *The Green Knight*, the large issues are contained in a plot too convoluted to summarize here. With one important exception, the characters are all part of a tight circle of friends whose lives are enmeshed by habit, love, jealousy, anger, suspicion—all the usual binding forces. The central drama revolves around Clement and Lucas Graffe, a pair of brothers into whose fratricidal drama a mysterious stranger thrusts himself. The stranger's name is Peter Mir ("Mir" means both "world" and "peace" in Russian, he explains) and he becomes the psychological center of the book. Even as his involvement with the brothers flings them from one violent and mystifying climax to another, Peter inspires a calm faith and trust in the circle of friends to whom Clement introduces him. As if it isn't enough to have a name that means "world" and "peace," quite early in the book one of the characters compares Peter Mir to the Green Knight of medieval legend. But it isn't until the end of the book that this

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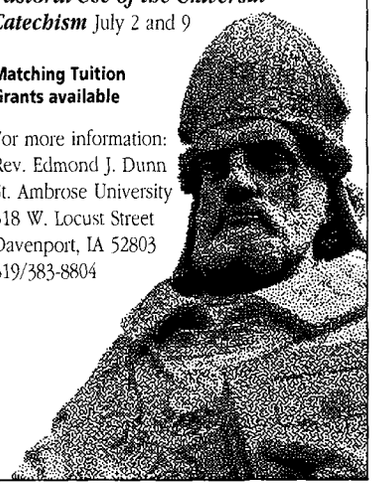


legend is retold. As with the Cain and Abel story, the connections are tenuous. "Pieces of the story are there, but aren't they somehow jumbled up and all the wrong way round?" asks Clement.

Almost all the characters in the novel are used to embody one abstraction or another. Art is represented by a sixteen-year-old child painter who has magic powers to move stones and a reverence for the natural world that borders on insanity. Religion makes its appearance in the person of Bellamy James who, in a series of letters to a monk, shares with the reader his puerile longing to find enlightenment and sanctity in monastic life. The monk's sensible replies attempt to bring Bellamy to a realistic understanding of the true nature of religious vocation, but Murdoch undermines the credibility of this character by having him leave the priesthood and the church. Murdoch's notion of a true vocation can be found in a lecture the historian Lucas offers to his pupil: "Remember that this is a lifelong dedication, you are entering upon it as into a religious house, something to which you must give your whole life....You must be an ascetic, shun sins, avoid remorse and guilt....Do not marry....Solitude is essential." A dog named Anax takes up so many pages (yawn) that he must represent something, perhaps goodness and innocence.

At the conclusion of a very intricate plot, all these characters pair off as they do in a Mozart opera, but, alas, without the music.

Fans of Iris Murdoch will probably enjoy this work; it is very like many of her earlier novels. Those who are not fans will probably be annoyed by the endless repetitions of story and idea as the characters dream about, muse on, chew over, and tell each other what has happened, is happening, and is going to happen. Another source of annoyance will no doubt be the author's habit of using magic as a carpet under which she can sweep all the inconvenient loose ends of character and plot. Perhaps annoyance is not a serious enough response. Alasdair MacIntyre offers another possibility:

"What entangles us and so endangers [human] freedom is our propensity to be deceived by a self-indulgent resort to myth and fantasy, a resort which makes us all too easy victims of those who use myth and fantasy to enchant us." □

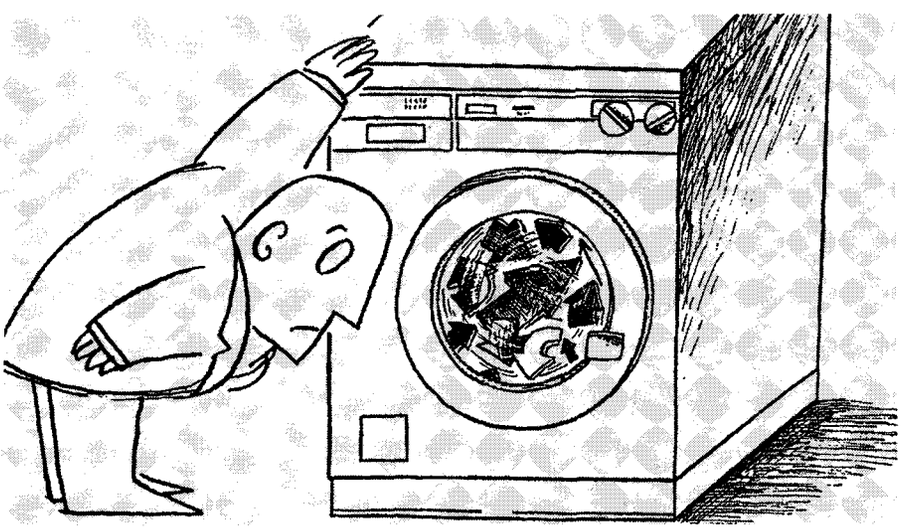
A HARDY PERENNIAL

ETHNONATIONALISM
The Quest for Understanding
Walker Connor
Princeton University Press, $14.95, 234 pp.

John Feffer

Until recently it had been an article of faith among political scientists that nationalism was on the decline. Economic growth, technological advances, and geopolitical necessities, it was argued, were pushing the peoples of the world toward a recognition of commonalities rather than of differences. Nationalism was a nineteenth-century matter, its sporadic outbursts in the twentieth-century purely anachronistic. In no time at all, these ideologies of blood and soil would become entirely passé, like feudalism or phrenology.

Long before the Yugoslav wars and the break-up of the Soviet Union, Walker Connor stubbornly resisted this consensus. Publishing his conclusions in scholarly journals, Connor consistently maintained that ethnonationalism—a loyalty to one's "kind"—was not disap-



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pearing, indeed, had never been stronger. According to this heretical professor of political science from Trinity College in Connecticut, the age of nationalism never ended. It is with us still: in Bosnia, in Spain, throughout the developing world, and yes, even in the "postethnic" United States.

Ethnonationalism: A Quest for Understanding is a collection of Connor's essays spanning a twenty-five-year period. So prescient are these articles—and so enduring the problems they tackle—that updating has required only a handful of footnotes and bracketed information. In part, the writing remains timely because Connor does not confine his analysis to particular conflicts. Interested in the larger picture, Connor focuses on the political science profession and its misconceptions, stereotypes, and just plain ignorance of nationalism.

Where have Connor's colleagues gone wrong? The problems begin with definitions. Nationalism, Connor stresses, "is subjective and consists of the self-identification of people with a group—its past, its present, and, what is most important, its destiny." Patriotism, often confused with nationalism, is an allegiance to the state, a political not an ethnic body. To distinguish these concepts, the Russians have two different words for "Russian": *russkie* (ethnic Russian) and *rossiyane* (living on the territory of Russia). In English, however, the conflation of nationalism and patriotism produces an enormous cloud of confusion around the issues of ethnicity and citizenship.

For instance, as Connor points out, the term "nation-state" is in most cases a misnomer since only rarely does the state serve only one nation or ethnic group. Moreover, "transnational" institutions—such as the European Union or GATT—are in fact *interstate* organizations. Similarly, the United Nations is misnamed, for it contains states and not nations.

Given such definitional inexactitude, it is not surprising that political scientists make higher order mistakes. With grace and precision, Connor directly tackles a series of myths sacred to the profession. A chief assumption among political scientists, for instance, has been that increased modernization leads to greater ethnic assimilation. Over time and as a consequence of higher economic growth, France becomes more French, Nigeria more Nigerian, and so forth. Not so, Connor objects: modernization brings previously isolated cultures into contact (and competition), while linking ethnically common but geographically dispersed peoples. Increased communication and travel are more likely to differentiate peoples and increase conflict.

Nor has economic prosperity diminished demands for ethnic autonomy. Witness the persistent national struggles of Basques and Slovenes, despite their relative economic success compared to the majority (or previously majority) populations of Castilian and Serb. Finally, "developed" Western states have not achieved the complete assimilation that they often claim. Scratch the surface of most "homogenous" states and you'll find an often surprising ethnic diversity: Scots, Welsh, Irish, Bretons, Catalans, Flemish, Bavar-

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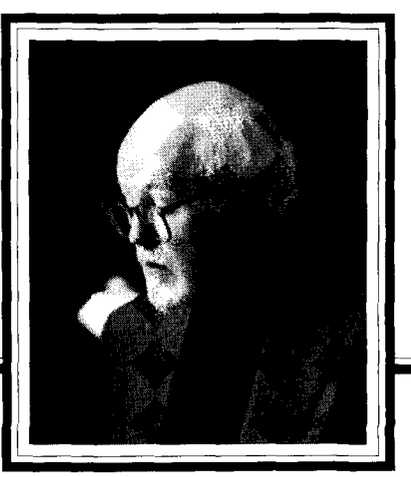

Aidan Kavanagh, OSB
Professor of Liturgics

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ians, Tyroleans, Lombards, Corsicans, Lapps, and so on.

Why have these myths of modernization, economic determinism, and assumed homogeneity persisted? As Connor suggests, political scientists are quite uncomfortable with nonrational factors in political life. Economic and political explanations generate more acceptable and more tangible empirical data than do psychological motivations. But this interpretation, based on the limitations of the discipline, is charitable.

Consciously or not, political scientists often reflect prevailing majority opinion or the views of the political leadership in their estimates of what constitutes a nation. Five years ago, whether Yugoslav academics considered Croatia to be a nation deserving its own state was a political issue, not merely a theoretical question. Today, a Croatian academic goes through a similar process when evaluating Istrian or Dalmatian identity. The tendency to buttress the dominant ethnic group's claims can be seen readily in the profession's pejorative characterizations of minority demands as "parochial," "particularist," or "tribal."

Where does all this leave the confused reader? The choice, Connor implies, is between two sets of myths. Ethnic groups mythologize their common heritage, their exalted beginnings, their heaven-blessed destiny. States that try to inculcate patriotism, an allegiance based on citizenship rather than ethnic identity, mythologize the virtues of assimilation and the resultant homogeneity of their population ("everyone in France is French and not Breton, Algerian, Corsican, etc."). There is no ultimate, objective truth, only a contest between myths that breaks into the headlines as "ethnic cleansing" conducted by the majority and "terrorism" waged by the minority.

Connor is expert in exposing such myths and accounting for their longevity. What he doesn't do, and where *Ethnonationalism* could have been improved if he had, is to evaluate these trends. Connor writes, for instance, that the "growing demand today, for good or evil, is to make reality approximate the myth of state unity by redrawing borders to reflect ethnic unity." But it is precisely this phrase "for good or evil" that sticks in the craw. What should public policy be: support the myth of state unity or the myth of ethnic unity? Or can the two myths be contained within a democracy that respects both majority rule and minority opinion?

In sidestepping these questions, Connor achieves a delicate neutrality in his essays, and methodologically speaking he should be applauded. But with all the disappointing analysis currently available on nationalism, which often suffers from precisely the failings identified in *Ethnonationalism*, it would certainly be useful to have an ounce of prescription from someone of his analytical prowess. Since we are still ensconced in the age of nationalism, however, Connor is in no danger of ceding his topic to the historians. For good or evil, he has plenty of time to publish a policy-flavored sequel to this admirable collection of essays. □

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IN BRIEF

GEORGE N. SHUSTER: ON THE SIDE OF TRUTH, by Thomas E. Blantz, C.S.C., University of Notre Dame Press, $34.95, 382 pp.

With a long public career as distinguished as was his, George N. Shuster deserves an official biography which is this comprehensive. A less thorough study than Father Blantz's would have missed many of the accomplishments of an extraordinary life. To begin with, there were the twelve years (1926-37) George Shuster served as managing editor of *The Commonweal*. Week after week he planned each issue, wrote and edited articles, editorials, and book reviews—at times using a pseudonym to obscure the amount of his writing in a single issue. He secured impressive contributions to the magazine's pages from eminent American and European authors. His anti-Franco stance in the Spanish Civil War and his opposition to American participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games are examples of his firm unwillingness to shun controversy when principle was at stake.

Demanding as all these activities were, they hardly bear comparison with the number and complexities that were to follow. As president of Hunter College from 1945 to 1960 Shuster encountered the intense controversies of a period of change. By then he had lost to the Nazis in Vienna the manuscript of his long-developed study of German democracy. During his Hunter years, important international as-

REVIEWERS

JOHN T. McGREEVY *teaches history at Harvard.*

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is the author of a book of stories,* The Last to Go *(Harcourt Brace).*

MOLLY FINN, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, lives in New York City.*

JOHN FEFFER *is the author of* Shock Waves: Eastern Europe after the Revolutions *(South End, 1992).*

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signments kept him crossing the Atlantic. For perhaps his most important official post, land commissioner for Bavaria, he took an eighteen-months' leave of absence from Hunter, ending in December 1951.

Shuster had a leading role in the founding and activities of UNESCO, in the American Council of Education, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and many more agencies of a comparably constructive stature that are too numerous to cite in a brief review. Even in his last sixteen years, when he served as assistant to Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of his beloved Notre Dame, George Shuster was not spared the tensions of several major controversies.

What I missed in this well-researched official biography was a more explicit, intimate picture of the man. What was George Shuster really like in person? More examples of his kindliness, sense of humor, desire to encourage younger writers, and other endearing personal qualities would have filled out this tribute to a notable scholar, educator, administrator, and statesman. But Father Blantz has produced an enthusiastic, well-documented study which does due justice to a life of consistently Christian achievement.

E.S.S.

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

lescent girls to say no to sex, and teach them how to resist pressure from their peers...."

Have you any message for boys, or, heaven forbid, do you subscribe to the common notion that boys will be boys and nothing can be done about it?

The message conveyed, though surely not intended, is that boys are always the aggressors and that avoidance of out-of-wedlock pregnancy is all up to the girls. It just is not so. We must as a society find ways to encourage both boys and girls "to say no to sex, and teach them how to resist pressure." (MSGR.) JOHN L. GERETY

Listening to gays

Oquossoc, Maine

To the Editors: This is a late response to your issue of January 28. I read it with great interest, having spent the past eighteen months as one of two Roman Catholic representatives on a Maine Council of Churches committee studying the topic "Seeking Justice: Issues of Sexual Orientation."

James Kales's report on the vote in my native city of Lewiston, Maine, that resulted in repeal of a nondiscrimination ordinance covering sexual orientation missed an important point ["A Referendum in Maine: Voting on Gay Rights"]. A reputable polling firm that conducted exit polls in Lewiston at the time of the vote concluded that the repeal referendum had succeeded because most voters felt (rightly or wrongly) that the ordinance was unnecessary.

Having listened to James L. Nash on National Public Radio last year, I was amazed that he considered his co-panelists as representative of the gay/lesbian community ["On the Air: No Room for Dialogue"]. If he had read the work of someone like Bruce Bawer, whose book, *A Place at the Table*, was reviewed in the same issue, he would have known better. Our MCC committee has met with a wider representation and has had genuine dialogue....

Rather than nitpicking Paul Baumann's summary article ["An Incarnational Ethic"], allow me to share some insights I have

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gleaned from listening to gays and lesbians regarding what they are asking of the church. First, they want their dignity as persons created in the image and likeness of God to be recognized. Second, they want the inalienable human rights that flow from that dignity. Third, they want to live by the same moral norms heterosexual couples live by and have the same support. With regard to this third point, they would like the same accommodation the church makes to infertile heterosexual couples. To use Baumann's vocabulary, they do not see their condition as any more alien to "an incarnational ethic" than that of couples whose biological condition is also "nonprocreative."

As long as we insist that the sexuality issue takes precedence over the justice issue, we will retard the coming of the kingdom of God. (MSGR.) PAUL E. COTE

A non-problem

Portland, Oreg.

To the Editors: Wake up! There's a world out there with major problems. Homosexuality and its place in Christianity are not (or, to my mind, should not be) among those problems.

After reading and re-reading your issue of January 28, I was left with my usual reaction to such debates: This is not my business. Or yours, for that matter, unless you're gay. Christ would be the first to remind us that we aren't competent to judge the acceptability or the sanctity of other people's lives.

I believe that this continued fixation on matters sexual not only drives people away from the church, but keeps us from focusing on truly Christian issues: economic and political freedom, for instance, and love—or at least tolerance—of our neighbors. MEG DES CAMP

Alleva's wrong notes

Pacheco, Calif.

To the Editors: Richard Alleva's review of *The Piano* ["A Word of Dissent," January 14] is out of tune. His criticism that Ada's "silence is dramatic garnish, not substance" is untenable. Ada's silence is the most essential dramatic device of this film. It is her only power in the repressive, psychically and physically violent patriarchal world in which she exists. It allows her a small, but significant, measure of control over those who would control her.

The most glaring flaw in Alleva's review is his assertion that Ada's "progress toward sexual fulfillment is the central action of the movie." Rather, Ada's progress toward whole self-expression with impunity and without restriction is what propels this film.

In Ada's world, a stranger can purchase a wife, and a woman's mind and heart are expected to conform to the dictates of patriarchy. Any resistance is subject to punishment, invariably violent.

Stewart is the epitome of the depraved Western patriarch: a conqueror, hoarder, and manipulator of land, nature, indigenous peoples, women, and children. He is everything that keeps Ada from expressing her true self. She exists only to service his needs. The brilliance of Sam Neill's performance through Campion's direction is in disarming the audience with this deceivingly sympathetic, emo-

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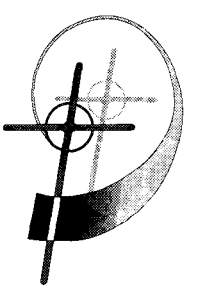

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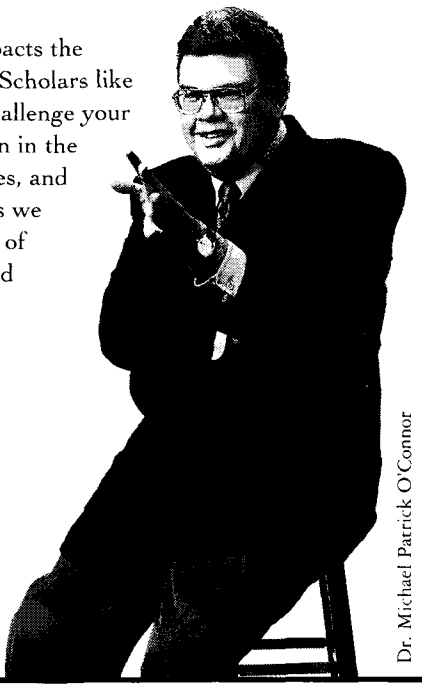

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tionally stunted character who is truly the victimizer in sheep's clothing.

We are not "meant to sympathize with both men equally." Harvey Keitel's passionately sensitive portrayal clearly indicates that Baines is our protagonist. He is a postmodern man: at one with the natural world rather than dominant over it, in touch with his inner life, and touched by that of others. He immediately recognizes Ada's inner beauty when he hears her at the piano. Recognizing its dehumanizing effects, Baines abandons the sexual bartering, a typical Western male tactic for eschewing intimacy. Ada is then free to accept his genuine desire for profound intimacy and is willing to risk exposing her real voice.

I commend and applaud Jane Campion on her cinematic masterpiece and extend my deepest appreciation for her inspirational creation. VIRGINIA SAENZ McCARTHY

Schindler's gift

Cocoa, Fla.

To the Editors: Something is missing from your treatment of the Oskar Schindler story ["Saintly Sybarite," February 11]. What Schindler did is beyond human comprehension or capacity. I see in it a case of the Holy Spirit acting through a person who from a human perspective would be seen as the least qualified and least expected to act as he did, to save nearly 1,100 Jews from death at the hands of the Nazis. Yes, he was a Christian, but many officials in the churches supported Nazi racism—if not by commission then definitely by omission.

In saving Jewish lives, Oskar Schindler saved something of our human dignity. Perhaps I see this because I happen to have a friend, a Jewish classmate of mine in high school in Cracow, who worked for Schindler and traveled with him at the end of World War II from Plaszow in Poland to the Swiss border. It is good that Schindler's story has become known but little emphasis has been given to its spiritual value and significance, nor to the fact that Schindler was treated as a pariah by postwar German society.

ROMAN K.C. JOHNS

How God works

Houston, Tex.

To the Editors: It happens that I am not

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easily brought to tears; even at my mother's death and funeral I could not cry, though I felt very close to her. But as I reached the end of Bob Logan's article ["More Hungry Boys," February 25], tears were streaming down my face.

I am three years younger than Bob Logan, but like him I lived through the Great Depression. This is what I saw in the restaurant owner's words and actions: How wonderful it is that God works his goodness to us through other human beings. My thoughts went back over my own life. I saw God's compassion for me as he worked through those I turned to in certain trying times when I hit rock bottom. His goodness always came through, even in my folly! From the pinnacle of age, I saw myself in Bob's shoes, remembering another hungry boy. My hunger was spiritual. Perhaps Bob's was also; he was going home.

(REV.) JOHN A. WEIHRER

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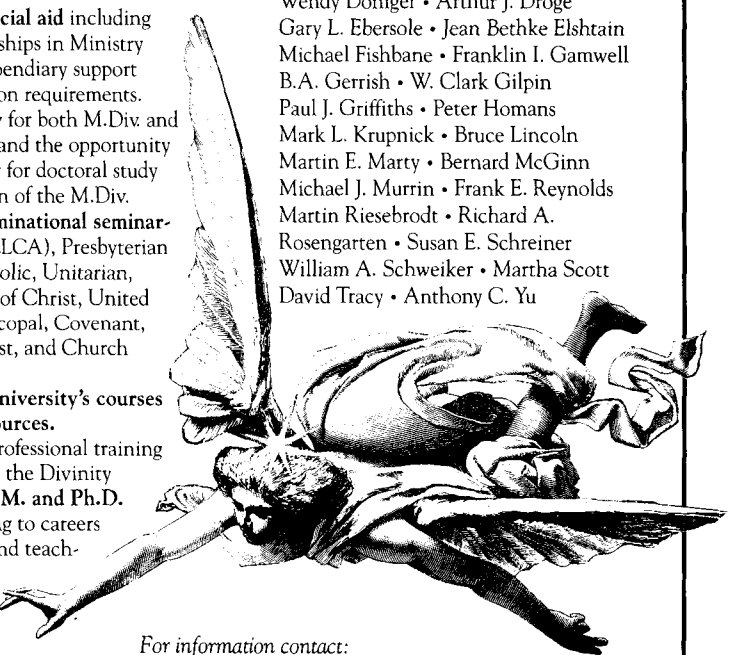

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The tax man

ROBERT JOE STOUT

Looking back, I remember working for county government as a bad period in my life. I considered myself a writer, not an accountant, but fate conspired to put me behind a desk in a basement filled with files, calculators, and stacks of computer printouts.

My bookkeeper, a doggedly loyal woman who had teen-aged kids and took care of her semi-invalid mother-in-law in addition to working full-time, had a terrible time with the irate taxpayers who stormed in waving their tax bills. But I rather enjoyed talking with them; it was a break from the printouts, and most had legitimate complaints.

Being new to the game (and not an accountant by nature), I tried to explain how the process worked, from how their property was assessed to the way the computer distributed funds to schools, irrigation districts, and fire departments.

I didn't get through very often. I was talking numbers and my visitors were talking feelings. So instead of giving answers, I started to ask questions. To my surprise, even the most irate and antagonistic had good things to say about government, once the right questions were asked.

They told me about special schools their handicapped children attended, firemen who rescued stranded animals, and emergency loans the county had granted them after their homes had burned. They told me how sheriff's deputies had come to warn them about downed power lines, how probation officers had kept their kids out of juvenile hall, and how emergency crews had pulled their trucks out of mud slides.

One woman, her head tilted to get full view of me through her trifocals, put her hand on my shoulder and confided that she wouldn't at all mind handing a school teacher the money she was paying in taxes, or giving it to a welfare mother, or even giving it to me for the work I was doing. Then she placed her tax bill in front of me, with its columns of figures, percentages, and abbreviations, and, nearly on the verge of tears, said: "If you don't care about me and how I feel, why should I care about you?"

Her words stayed with me a long time after I left that cramped basement for other work. But today the county that had employed me is on the verge of bankruptcy and its taxpayers still believe that they are getting ripped off. Why?

I think it's because the process has removed people from the product. There's no connection between paying and receiving. The lady with the trifocals was right: If taxpayers could write their checks directly to the snow plough operator, the foster parent, or the air traffic controller, they might not mind paying because they would know precisely what they were getting for their tax dollars. Instead of cutbacks, they'd probably ask for more meat inspectors, freeway builders, FBI agents, and other dedicated public employees who perform essential tasks.

Government isn't private business, and it can't run that way. The more streamlined it becomes—the more like private enterprise, with computers condensing information into financial demands—the more it cuts citizens out of the process. When that happens, taxpayers sense that they have no more control over their government than the holder of a single share of General Motors stock has over the broad decisions made by that company.

Thus the things most praised in private enterprise become the things most criticized in government. In the years before the passage of California's famous property-tax reform initiative, Proposition 13, taxpayers would flock to school board meetings to argue for and against issues as various and vital as sex education, extra pay for football coaches, and computers in classrooms. They understood that their local boards established the tax rates by which they would pay for everything from funding teachers' raises to purchasing toilet paper.

Following Proposition 13, however, distribution of the fixed amounts of property tax assessments were absorbed by the state. Taxpayers stopped attending local board meetings or paying much attention to local elected officials. The more alienated they became from the process, the more they demanded less government. And the less they got. Freeway systems, schools, and other support systems eroded. As a California dentist told me, "We no longer govern ourselves, and we no longer know by whom we're governed. No wonder so many people feel the system has failed."

Participation is the key to self-rule. Democracy ceases to be democracy when it becomes an impersonal machine. The major problem with most of our political institutions today is that they function without interference (read involvement) from those who pay for them, from those they are intended to serve. Historically, despite many instances of racial and economic segregation, selective law enforcement, and inadequate health protection, local control over local issues provided Americans with a love for and trust in a system they felt they had devised and had the power to change. How to recover that? One place to start might be for local governments to include pie charts with tax bills, explaining just how tax monies are being spent, and asking for comments. As the woman in the trifocals said, "If you don't care about me and how I feel, why should I care about you?" □

Robert Joe Stout lives in Chico, California. He is writing a book on Mexico.

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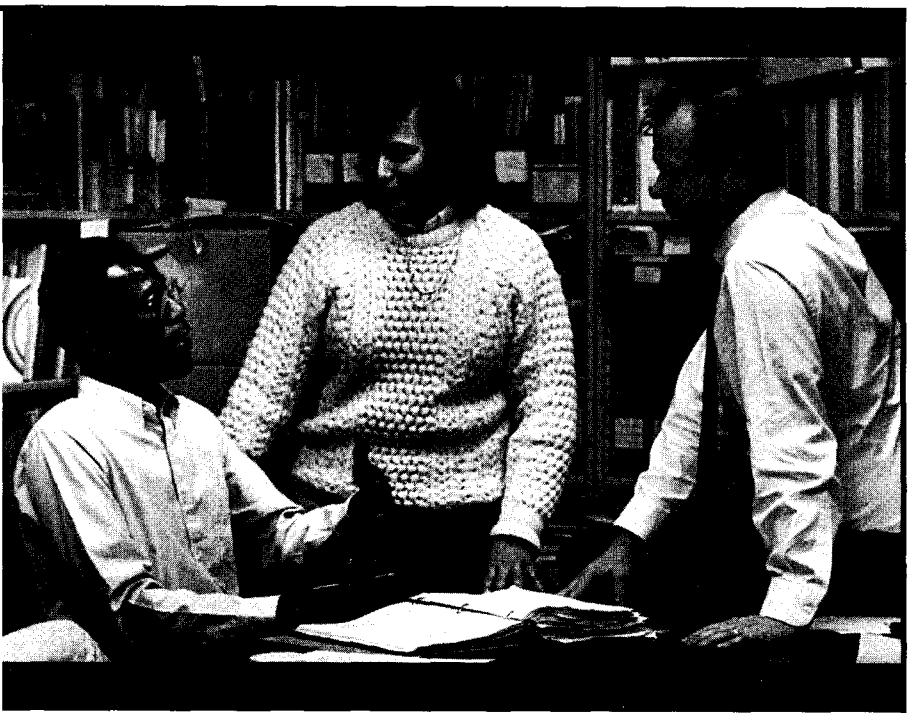

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